

SUBJECT: State holiday on Martin Luther King Jr. Day

COMMITTEE: State Affairs: committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 7 ayes — Cain, Crawford, Danburg, Jones, Marchant, Oakley, Saunders
0 nays
1 present, not voting — Laney
5 absent — Seidlits, Bomer, Eckels, Gibson, Perez

SENATE VOTE: On final passage, April 11 - 29-2 (Bivins, Sims)

WITNESSES: For — Marc Rodriguez, City of San Antonio
Against — David Martin, self-employed investor

BACKGROUND: In 1987 the Legislature authorized heads of state agencies to allow employees to substitute Martin Luther King Jr. Day, the third Monday in January, as a paid state holiday for any other state holiday occurring on a weekday, except general-election day, on which the agency is required to be open.

DIGEST: CSSB 134 would designate the third Monday in January as Martin Luther King Jr. Day and would require that it be observed like a national holiday. The bill would remove the second Monday in October (Columbus Day) from the list of state holidays.

SUPPORTERS SAY: Martin Luther King Jr. was one of the most important Americans of this century. He devoted his life to the struggle for equal rights through nonviolent means. To honor his memory and the goals and values for which he fought, the U.S. Congress has declared his birthday a national holiday. This bill would elevate the status of Martin Luther King Jr. Day in Texas from an optional state holiday for state employees to a nationally observed state holiday.

The professional sports industry has indicated that unless Texas makes Martin Luther King Jr. a state holiday, teams would be reluctant to have playoff games in Texas or to locate new expansion teams here. Houston is hopeful of being host to the Superbowl in 1995 and San Antonio is building a domed stadium in hopes of attracting a major league team. It would be foolish to endanger these prospects by refusing to join the rest of the nation in honoring Dr. King.

The bill would take Columbus Day off the list to offset the new holiday. Columbus Day does not have the same standing in Texas that it does in some other parts of the country, like New York and New Orleans, and the October observance would not be missed here.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

The state already allows employees to observe Martin Luther King Jr. Day as a holiday if they want to; the day should remain an optional holiday. At a time of fiscal austerity, this is no time to be creating new state holidays.

Substituting Martin Luther King Jr. Day for Columbus Day would not offset the cost of a new state holiday since the General Appropriations Act for the past several years has not recognized Columbus Day as an official holiday for state employees.

Martin Luther King Jr. is not universally considered to have achieved the same status as Lincoln and Washington, for instance. While his day should be observed, as now, it need not be a full-fledged holiday.

**OTHER
OPPONENTS
SAY:**

This would be a particularly inappropriate time to be cutting Columbus Day from the list of national holidays observed by state employees; next year will be the 500th anniversary of Columbus' discovery of the Americas.

NOTES:

SB 134 as passed by the Senate would also have changed Confederate Heroes Day from January 19 to June 3 and made it an optional holiday for state employees, in addition to the change in status of Martin Luther King Jr. Day. It also would not have removed Columbus Day as a holiday.